

# Chaco Road Impact Study Flounders in Confusion and Challenge

The Environmental Assessment (EA) being conducted on CR7950, the primary access road to Chaco Culture National Historical Park, has drawn criticism from many groups as well as from Katherine Slick, New Mexico State Historic Preservation Officer. After a third meeting in Aztec on February 12, Ms. Slick expressed concern that the purpose and need were still “not well articulated”; that the proponents’ involvement seemed “weak or vague”; and that the process described by the consultants hired by San Juan County, URS Corp. and Taschek Environmental, was not clear “in letting people know what was being requested.” Critics of the EA process cite a number of examples. Preliminary documents furnished by URS indicate that the purpose and need for the road improvements are to create better access for the local population and to fix a hazardous road. Undeniably, local Navajo, like many Native Americans, deserve easier lives, but URS itself claims that 90% of the traffic on CR7950 goes to Chaco, and is not local. In addition, all evidence suggests that the community serviced by CR7950 is very small. To date, URS and Taschek have not answered requests for population data. Whether the road poses a liability for San Juan County has also not been established. No statistics supporting any fatal or even serious accidents have been presented. Undocumented accounts point to the regrettable death of one cow. The County admits there has never been scheduled maintenance but does not accept maintenance as an alternative. Paving the road



Chaco ruins (Copyright 2007 O.P.M.)

will only make the road more dangerous by increasing speed and visitation.

The URS Corp. handout attempting to predict visitation increase brought about by road improvements provides more controversy. URS graphs suggest a modest increase in visitation, contradicting the National Park Service (NPS) 2005 Transportation Study by Jonathan Upchurch, which suggests potential, fivefold increases. URS rejects the NPS study without providing comment. Common sense suggests that the visitation at Chaco might well match Mesa Verde’s, jumping to over 500,000 per year in several years.

Representative Tom Udall earmarked the original \$800,000 to improve the Chaco road. Many insiders contend that he now regrets that decision. San Juan County has approached him asking for \$1,000,000 more of taxpayer money to complete the project. Please contact Rep. Udall (see page 3) and urge him to direct the use of the existing funds into improvements other than paving, and to grant no more earmarks. In an election year, he does not need more association with this project. Not only does the project face growing challenges and questions about energy interests near Chaco, but there is a Pandora’s box of legal questions for San Juan County about the paving of the first three miles. Those questions have not been forgotten by the Hopi or by concerned groups. It may only be a matter of time before the box is opened farther. For email addresses and information about how to participate and help preserve this pristine World Heritage Site, visit the Chaco Alliance at [www.dont-pave-chaco.com](http://www.dont-pave-chaco.com), or the San Juan Citizens Alliance at [www.sanjuancitizens.org](http://www.sanjuancitizens.org). Thanks for the continued support.

—Anson Wright, Chaco Alliance



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